No. 100

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"I am sorry that we ever met," he said. "You go your way and I'll go mine. But do not think that we can ever forget."

R. of M. C., No. 100.

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MARJORIE ERICSEN had just asked the farm woman if she could purchase some meat milk or bread from her. "I could spare you a loaf of bread and a sealer of milk," said the dull-witted woman in the doorway, "and mebbe half a pie."

"That would do nicely," concurred the luminous-eyed woman with the oddly tremulous lips, as she quietly slipped the emerald ring from her finger and wrapped it in the bill. "But you must take this for all your trouble."

"It don't seem right to take money for a bit of food," protested the impoverished mistress of that impoverished home.

"Then take it to remember us by," suggested the softer-voiced woman as she thrust the folded bill into the other's only half-reluctant hand.

She did her best to make the movement a significant one.

She wanted to say more, to plant some further seed of speculation in that none-too-fertile mind, but she was afraid of the ever-watchful figure behind her.

She was still again tempted to step in through the door after the retreating housewife, but that, she once more remembered, would be skirting too closely the margin of peril.

She was conscious of her enemy stepping closer to her as she waited there, though she did not once turn her face toward him.

She heard him curse softly, apparently at the length of their wait.

Accumulating suspicion even sent him slowly back toward the car, and for one foolish moment she imagined him to be on the brink of flight—precipitate flight.

But he was still there, she found when she turned

her head, still waiting and watchful, with his right hand resting in his coat pocket.

Marjorie Ericsen's heart sank when the woman returned with a mason jar of milk and a loaf of bread wrapped in a newspaper on which was balanced half an apple pie.

Promptly banished then was the forlorn hope that had been so stubbornly fighting its way up in her heart, the hope that this simpler-minded friend had scented suspicion in a situation which the gift of an incomparably precious ring must have rendered still more paradoxical —had scented suspicion and slipped away to give an alarm.

But deliverance was not to come from that quarter now.

The searching glance which the tortured woman directed at the wind-roughened face before her was returned by a glance that was opaque and animal-like in its placidity.

The housewife's glance did not even remain long enough on her visitor's face to detect the tears that slowly welled up into the tragically shadowed eyes, tears of frustration and defeat and fear touched with hopelessness.

The countrywoman was looking, in fact, beyond the tense figure to the maroon-colored car that flashed bright in the sunlight.

Yet Marjorie's heart beat faster a moment later, for she could see the lips of the opaque-eyed woman moving, moving in silence, as though repeating to herself the numbers on the untarnished license plate confronting her.

"Which way are you folks goin'?" she asked, and the dullness seemed at last gone from her voice.

At the question a thrill even went tingling

through the other woman's body, a thrill of hope touched with gratitude.

"We're goin' straight on," was the prompt and noncommittal reply from the man in the rear, as he again stepped closer to the hesitating woman with the food in her arms. "And what's more, we've got to hurry."

His captive could feel his fingers clutch her arm and swing her about.

She could feel him forcibly propelling her towards the open car door. She had to fight down an impulse to break away from him, to make one last forlorn dash for freedom.

But that, she remembered, would only end in disaster.

And there was still a shadow of hope that the open-mouthed woman so blankly studying them from the doorway would sense something untoward in that situation, would start the belated chain of action that could stop them in their flight.

"Get out o' here quick!" commanded her captor as he slammed the car door shut, and she had no choice but to throw in her clutch and plunge forward again through the untidy gap in the fence where a gate should have been.

"Faster!" he repeated, once they were out on the road.

And they went humming on down a red clay incline that led through an oak copse and out of sight of the lonely-looking farm-house with the peering figure still standing at its corner.

The woman driving the car became conscious of a disturbing new series of sounds, of champing and deglutition noises close beside her.

She saw, when she turned her head, that her captor was busy devouring his portion of apple pie.

His stubbled lip was maculated with flakes of crust and his chin was streaked with a sirupy liquid that dripped on his coat front. He ate intently, almost ravenously.

He champed and macerated the huge bites, swallowing them with a forward thrust of the chin that made her think of an overgreedy pullet gagging on a too hastily bolted bread crust.

And when he could swallow no more he lifted the sealer of milk to his mouth and drank form its rim.

She realized, as he tilted the emptying sealer still higher, that his eyes were half closed and that his thoughts were not on the road before him.

Her own appraising glance, however, had already taken note of the nearing side road that branched off at right angles to their line of flight.

She had no knowledg as to where that road led or in what it might end.

But it would be an advantage, she knew, to quarter off to the left rather than to continue straight ahead.

It would keep her more in home territory and carry the promise of another possible turn that might send her doubling back toward the point from which they were supposed to be fleeing.

And with the lapse of every hour, she knew, the campaign to account for her absence, to trace her and find her, would become more active.

She timed the speed of her driving accordingly, so that when her captor was draining the last of the milk from his uptilted sealer she was cautiously throwing over her wheel a trifle and tooling the car by its widest possible arc into the side road that climbed eastward over a runneled hill stippled with stones.

She scarcely breathed as her companion put down the empty sealer, puzzled by the rougher going, and

stared frowningly through the windshield.

But he remained unconscious, obviously, of her change of direction.

"D'you want to eat?" he asked, roughly enough, as he broke off one end of the brown-crusted bread and took a bite from it.

"No," she answered, trying to conceal her shudder of distaste.

Yet her heart sank a minute or two later, as he stopped eating and stared pointedly at the surrounding country.

"Which way are we travelin'?" he brusquely inquired. He even leaned forward to squint up at the sun overhead.

"We're going west, aren't we?" she countered, with an altogether studied indifference.

His grunt seemed to be one of assent. And as her eyes turned to his face she noticed something there she had not noticed before.

She detected a new heaviness about the red-rimmed eyelids, a gray shadow of weariness about the hollowed face.

The man plainly was in need of sleep—was dead for sleep—and at that discovery a fresh hope grew up in her none-too-happy heart.

"You're tired, aren't you?" she found the courage to ask.

He ignored her question, beyond a deliberately willed straightening of his stooping shoulders.

Then he took out his revolver, examined it, and let it rest between his taut-held knees.

"Turn to the left at the first crossroad," he commanded, once more frowningly studying the country about them.

They were dropping down into a more open valley,

with fenced fields and an occasional farmhouse in the distance.

Even the road along which they rocked became a better one.

They could see a small truck pull out of a lane and turn toward them, its ruddy-faced young driver staring with rural curiosity at the shimmering coupe that swung past him.

And when the woman at the wheel noticed, for the first time, that their highway was paralleled by a row of telephone poles, a little of her earlier sense of desolation slipped away from her.

She could even see smoke going up from a kitchen chimney where, plainly, some placid housewife was cooking her farm mate's midday meal.

Still farther ahead she could see a bit of woodland through which a brook wound.

The sight of that running water reminded her that her throat was very dry, that she had been thirsty for an hour and more without knowing it, and it reminded her of still another chance of escape, if luck should be with her.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded, as she permitted the car to slow down.

"I'm very thirsty," she told him, with a hand pressed against her hot cheek.

He let his shrewdly speculative eye study her.

"I s'pose so," he said, as he stooped forward to pick up the empty milk sealer. "Pull up beside that stream and we'll both get out."

She did as he ordered. She noticed, as he got out of the car, that he held the revolver balanced in his right hand. With his left hand he held out the empty sealer.

"That's good clear water," he told her. "Go in there and get your drink But don't go beyond that first

thicket. If you do I'll put a bullet into you. Y'understand, don't you?"

"I understand," she said, as she took the sealer.

"I'll give you three minutes and no more," he cautioned her. "And bring that jar back full of water when you come."

When she looked bark she could see the odiously vigilant figure, high above her in the flat sunlight on the shoulder of the road, with the light flashing on the malignant metal thing held in his drooping right hand.

And the thicket, she saw, offered her less covering than she had hoped for.

Beyond it was a stretch of swampy land across which it would be almost impossible to pick a way, much less attempt an escape at full speed.

And she knew, as she heard his impatient call to her, that her chance had not yet been proffered to her.

"Don't dawdle!" her enemy called down to her as she returned with deliberately slow steps to the car.

For it was a relief, she found, to be even a stone's throw away from him.

He broke the silence, once they were on their way again, by turning to her with an angry frown.

"I s'pose you knew all along," he suddenly cried, "that we were headed the wrong way."

"I went the way you asked me to go," was her quiet-toned response.

"Well, when we come to that paved road ahead, turn to the right. And the longer you are in gettin' across this state, remember, the longer you'll have to put up with my company."

She made no further comment until they had turned eastward again on the burnished black asphalt of a main-traveled highway.

That brought them again once more into a world

of men and movement.

Cars passed them and houses stood closer about them and signboards and traffic signals confronted them.

It was the sight of a service station that finally prompted her to speak.

"We'll need gas soon," she reminded him.

"How soon?" he demanded.

"I can't tell until I look at my tank gauge."

"Where is it?"

"At the back of my car."

He waited a moment until they were on a stretch of road clear of traffic.

"Stop and look at that gauge," he commanded.

But frustration still confronted her. For when she got down from her seat her captor did the same. He remained close beside her as she stepped to the back of the car.

"We've still seven gallons," she said, as she read the gauge.

"Then we'll go on until we come to the right place for fillin' up," he announced, as he motioned her back into the driving seat.

She saw, as they moved forward again, that they were being overtaken by a high-bodied truck laden with pike poles and coils of copper wire.

On the open back of this truck, high above her, squatted four men in soiled denim jumpers, four ruddy and weathered and stalwart-looking men who obviously made up the repair gang for some telephone company.

One was singing as he rode; another was contentedly smoking a cigarette; still another stared back at her with the detached audacity of lusty manhood inspecting a pretty face.

They gave her the impression of being muscular and careless and courageous, of being the kind of men

who could light-leartedly face danger, who, when a call came for help, would tumble into a fight for almost the sheer love of fighting.

She was solaced by their presence there in front of her.

She even speculated on the possibility of suddenly throwing on her power and running into them, of crashing her headlights into the rear end of their truck and bringing them swarming down about her.

But that, she remembered, would also bring the strike from the coiled rattlesnake beside her. They, as likely as not, would not be afraid of his revolver.

They would probably pound him into a pulp with their pick handles and pole shovels, but she would no longer be there to exult over that belated victory.

Some dormant part of her still cried out for a triumph less qualified, for an evening up of the score without the cost of actual life.

She lagged behind them, nevertheless, still wringing some ghostly consolation out of the promise of some safety in being near them.

"Get past that truck," curtly commanded the man at her side.

One of the trouble shooters on the repair car, the one who had been singing, laughed and waved a russet-colored hand at her as they veered ahead of the more ponderous vehicle.

She was tempted to venture an answering signal, but a sound from her captor, half grunt and half warning, blighted that impulse in the bud.

"What's that town ahead?" suddenly asked the refugee, stooping forward to stare through the windshield.

"I don't know," she answered, truthfully enough.

She could see the line of worry deepen between his

shaggy eyebrows. She could see his face harden and a faint dewing of moisture show on his pallid skin.

And the next moment she was able to fathom the source of his ever-increasing tenseness.

At the roadside, in front of a wide-doored garage, a khaki-clad state trooper stood beside his motorcycle.

The sunlight glinted on his metal buttons, on the peak of his cap, on the serried array of brass that showed along his cartridge belt.

She could see his brown leather pistol holster. And at almost the same moment she was conscious of a movement on the part of the man beside her as he sat back in the seat as though contentedly folding his arms.

But under the hand covered by his left elbow he held his waiting revolver, so close to her that she could feel the barrel end against her ribs.

He did not speak. But she knew well enough what the movement implied.

Without being quite conscious of doing so, she even increased her speed as they bore down on that self-reliant looking figure in leather and flashing metal.

"Go slower," muttered her captor out of one corner of his mouth.

She could see the sweat of anxiety on his intent face. In his cavernous eye, too, she could see an animal-like glow of desperation that sent little tingles of terror up and down her tired body.

And she ceased to breathe altogether as they forged slowly past the khaki-clad trooper, who lifted his head and stared into the car as they went by.

So alert and inquiring was that look that the woman at the wheel was half hoping and yet half afraid the officer of the law would signal them to stop or even come chugging after them on his motorcycle.

That feeling apparently was shared by her enemy.

as he almost hissed his peremptory "Speed up!" in her ear.

But they were neither halted nor overtaken.

The strain, however, had clearly told on the refugee, who wiped his face with his coat sleeve and sank limply back against the suede upholstery.

"We're not goin' through that town," he announced, rousing himself with an effort. "Turn at that next corner and hit back into the side roads."

"But we'll only get lost again," she demurred, slowing down.

"Well, that's what I want to do," was his half-listless retort, as they swung off the highway. "I guess it's goin' to pay us to lay up until dark and do our travelin' by night."

"Is that very fair to me?" she asked, when she was able to control her voice.

"You don't figure in these movements," he proclaimed, looking not at her but at the road ahead.

"But I'm still a human being," she contended, tightening her grip on the wheel.

"So am I," was his brusque rejoinder. "And I'm goin' to do my best to remain one."

"Do you think treating me inhumanly will help you much?" she inquired, with a forlorn sort of fortitude.

She was even able to turn and look at him. But he evaded her glance.

"Well, this is war, or the next thing to it," he said, with his sardonic half smile. "And some old bird's already said that war is hell."

"It must be," she said out of the ensuing silence.

That nettled him with a show of anger.

"Say, you're gettin' off so easy you ought to be shakin' hands with yourself," he said, as he reached for

his loaf of bread and broke off a piece. "Most men in my position would've put a bullet through your empty head two hours ago."

She resented that "empty head" even more than his self-centering brutality.

And in some way and at some time before he was through with her she would prove that her intelligence was equal to his own.

She would show him there was some shadow of justice in the world. She would make him regret his mercilessness. She would——

"Keep in the road!" he commanded, with an angry elbow jerk against her body.

She steadied herself again and once more watched the narrowing wheel trail as it ascended a slope bordered by woodlands and went down a second slope that ended in a wooden bridge spanning a stream that brawled between moss-covered bowlders.

It was a narrow bridge and an old one. The planking, she could see, was loose.

One of its floor boards had even been overturned, and in it her doubly sensitized vision detected a nail—a nail that protruded a good two inches from the abraded timber surface.

She slowed down, studying that nail intently.

She made a pretense of being uncertain of her pathway over these loose timbers, bearing a trifle to the right and then to the left so that her front tire would escape that threatening spike end.

But she made it a point to see that her rear tire passed directly over it, and she was rewarded the next moment by hearing a hiss of air from the subsiding rubber.

The man at her side started violently at that sound, fixing her with a glance that was half question

and half challenge.

"We've got a blow-out," she said, with an achieved frown of annoyance, as they pounded slowly on over the rough road.

But her pallid-faced custodian did not seem to understand her.

"My back tire is flat," she explained, as they came to a stop.

The man beside her said "Hell!" under his breath.

He was still frowning when she reached first to the instrument board for the key that unlocked her spare tires and then to the door pocket for her husband's second key that released the padlocked chain about the two extra tires.

"Let the damn thing stay flat," he sullenly proclaimed. "We'll go on as we are."

"But I've got two spares on the back of my car," she said, as she held the keys out for him.

"Why can't you run on a flat tire?" he demanded, staring first one way and then the other along the empty side road.

A new quietness and a new patience had come to her. But the mind housed in what he had called an empty head was singularly wide awake.

"We could, of course, for a little way," she conceded. "But if we go too far my engine is likely to heat and stall, and it means we would have to go very slowly. And we'd attract attention, of course, in every town we went through on a flat tire."

He scowled thoughtfully as he took up the mason jar of water and slowly unscrewed the top.

There was a touch of the contemptuous, she thought, in the paraded unconcern with which he drank from the sealer.

That movement reminded her of her own return-

ing thirst. But she sat silent, holding her dry lips tight against her teeth.

"Well, get your tire on," he commanded, as he put down the mason jar. "We've sure got some travelin' to do before this time tomorrow."

The brutality of his tone no longer affected her.

Her thoughts in fact were not on him or his messages. She was pondering other and more important matters.

For all his petulant weariness, however, he followed her out of the car. And his revolver was once more in his hand, notwithstanding the insolent detachment with which he watched her.

Yet her movements were exceptionally deliberate as she turned the key in the ingenious small lock that held the outer spare on its metal bracket.

On second thought, indeed, she quickly reversed the key and relocked the concealed fastener.

Then she took up the heavier key of the padlock that held Graham's ridiculous safety chain linked about rim and rubber and bracket metal.

She unlocked and removed the chain, hooking the open padlock through a link of the chain end and letting it hang unregarded across her forearm as she made an effort to lift the heavy spare from its resting place.

That effort, however, was foredoomed to failure. So for the second time she went through the gestures of struggling with a weight that was manifestly too much for her.

"I don't seem able to get this tire free," she complained, as she straightened up and turned a worried face toward the watching man.

"I guess you're not tryin' any too hard," he accused, as he stepped frowningly forward.

"There's a lot of metal in these rims," she said

with an altogether new meekness, as she made room for him at the end of the car.

He took hold of the spare, half sullenly, half contemptuously, and tugged at it without success.

But his revolver, she noticed, was still practically in his hand, swinging from one finger by its trigger guard, and her moment had not yet arrived.

"It seems stuck there by the varnish," she ventured, as he stood staring resentfully down at the gray-metaled rim.

Then she watched him closely as he kicked the inflated rubber twice with the flat of his foot, apparently to jar loose the rim within it.

She watched him as he squatted and lifted and wrenched.

She watched him as, angered with defeat, he attacked it more determinedly, placing the encumbering revolver on the narrow shelf of metal between the tank gauge and the tonneau end.

It was still lamentably close to him, that all-essential firearm, but it was no longer in his hand.

And that, she remembered, meant a great deal.

"Get hold o' here!" he cried angrily out across his stooping shoulder.

She murmured a humble enough "All right" as she crowded closer in beside him.

She was so close, indeed, that she could detect the axillary odors of his heated body. But they were no longer repugnant to her.

She knew, as she crouched close to him, that her moment had come.

She also knew that her movement, once started, would have to be both quick and continuous.

She nursed a vague desire to knock the revolver from its resting place as an overture to her more impor-

tant intention, but she had no time for that; and she wanted to be sure of herself, for he would kill her, of course, if he deciphered her plan before she could carry it out.

Yet she did not hesitate. With a catlike quickness she swung the heavy safety chain about the sturdy bracket metal directly in front of him.

He emitted an inarticulate sound, apparently of protest at her clumsiness, as she reached in under his armpit and clutched at the swaying free end of the chain.

She even had it tightened against his ribs before he could quite understand.

She had it constricted about his lean waist, drawing the padlock closer to the last available link through which its bow could be thrust and snapped shut, before he fully realized her intention.

Then he cried aloud, in an ecstacy of high-pitched rage, and struck at her with his closed fist before she could stagger away.

But it was too late. It was too late, she exulted, as she stood panting in the open road.

For she had her enemy there, trussed to a ton and a half of inert metal. She had him there a prisoner, chained and locked to a frame of unyielding steel.

She had him where he could no longer browbeat and bully her, where he could no longer torture and humiliate her.

She had him completely and unequivocally in her power.

Yet she felt a trifle faint, as she remembered this, and was compelled to sit down a few paces away on the grassy shoulder of the road.

There she watched him, quietly and almost abstractedly, as he writhed and fought for a freedom that was beyond his reach.

He had twisted halfway about so that his back was no longer toward her.

By turning his head he could look at her, and on his face she could see a silent and reptilious hate that tended to curdle her blood for all her second wind of valor.

But he was secure there, she saw, even before he renewed his futile struggles.

She was vaguely relieved, however, when he once more became motionless. Yet there was something ominous in the ensuing silence.

He even appeared to be avoiding her gaze by turning away from her, by twisting about in his tight metal girth until he again faced the car.

She started to her feet the next moment with a small gasp of apprehension. For she suddenly realized the object of his strange movements.

It was the revolver that he was reaching for, the revolver balanced on the little metal shelf beside the tank gauge.

With that once in his hand he could still defy her and hold her off.

A well-placed shot, she remembered, might even break the padlock and hand him back his liberty.

Or perhaps by using its barrel as a lever he might still have power enough to twist one of those imprisoning chain links apart.

She ran toward him as he writhed into a better position for reaching in through the obstructing tire rim.

She could see the outstretched arm, the talonlike fingers, straining toward the shimmering metal.

His hand reached it, closed on it, before she could intercept him.

But she could not afford to be afraid of him. She

caught his unclean wrist in her own quick hands, and levering the lank arm back about the tire rim, tugged with all her strength.

He could neither withdraw that arm nor relieve the tension that threatened to snap the bone.

But a sudden grayness came into his face and his fingers relaxed as he groaned aloud.

She kicked the weapon at almost the same moment it fell, kicked it vigorously aside to the grass-covered shoulder slope of the road.

And she breathed deep again as she stood staring at the fettered man staring in turn at her.

It sent her mind back to her girlhood, when, with the careless willfulness of youth, she had once teased a zoo leopard through its cage bars.

She had never forgotten the blind rage, the burning hate in those opalescent eyes that had glared back at her.

And in the cavernous eyes confronting her she saw the same mute and malignant revolt against helplessness, the same unvoiced virulence.

It unnerved her mysteriously, taking the savor out of her triumph.

It even checked her in her advance toward the car where she had intended to restart her engine and drag her prisoner peremptorily back to the near-by town on the main road.

Drag him back in barbaric triumph, as the old Romans once dragged their enemies at their chariot wheels.

Instead of that, she hesitatingly picked up the revolver and turned away from him.

Then she walked slowly but steadily up the road slope. There was a ringing in her ears and an ache in her knees, but she disregarded them.

She strode on, tight-lipped, intent, stooping a little from sheer weariness of spirit.

But she did not stop until she came to the paved highway from which they had so recently detoured, the highway along which road-stands and houses stood companionably close to one another, and an intermittent flow of traffic reminded her that life with its multitudinous interests and unrests and pageantries had been going on without her and without thought of her.

But she made no effort to arrest that flowing stream along the opaque black pavement. Instead, she turned to a way-side lunch room.

Then she stopped short, for coming out of the door was a khaki-clad trooper, eating a chocolate bar as he came.

She thought, as her eyes first rested on the russet and resolute young face, that he was the officer she had passed but half an hour before.

As she looked at him more closely, however, she realized that he was the earlier trooper, the one whose stop signal she had so regally refused to obey.

He himself must have recognized her, for his face hardened as his casually roving eye centered and steadied on her motionless figure.

"I've been wanting you," he proclaimed, with the quick frown of affronted authority.

"Not nearly so much as I happen to want you," she retorted with a quietness that perplexed him. For she had expended too much that day either to be intimidated by his uniform or to react to his accusatory eye.

"What for?" he asked, for the first time conscious of an odd tenseness in her shadowy eyes.

"An escaped convict has been captured half a mile down this road," she said, as evenly as she was able.

"Who captured him?" was the curt and slightly

incredulous inquiry.

"I did," she answered, as she leaned against a wheeled oil barrel for support. "You'll find him chained to my car there. And by the way, I took this away from him," she added, as she held out the heavy-bodied revolver. "And while you're getting him, if you don't mind, I should like to have a cup of coffee and then telephone to my husband."

The nerve and unusual pluck displayed by Marjorie Ericsen had became the talk of the town. Her husband was proud of her. For a solid week she was kept busy receiving congratulations.

Some of them came by letter from distant friends who had read about the affair in the newspapers. Marjorie's telephone rang at almost regular intervals.

Among those who called in person to congratulate Mrs. Ericsen, was Rosalind Hope, the wife of Morris Hope. These two young women, who had passed through school together, had much to talk about besides the recent affair that was making Marjorie famous.

Mrs. Hope, having just returned to London from abroad, where she had been for over a year, also congratulated her friend upon having become the wife of Graham Ericsen.

"I knew you would land him, dear," she said with a smile. "You and Graham were destined for each other."

"Yes, I did," Marjorie admitted. "But God alone knows what I suffered before my one dream came true." She hesitated a moment, then went on with a blush: "I

suppose you know how he lost his first wife."

Rosalind Hope nodded.

"I read about it in the papers, Marjorie. She took an overdose of chloral, I believe."

"You — you heard nothing else?" Marjorie inquired, holding her breath.

"No, nothing," answered Mrs. Hope. "But I thought it was such a pity I remember Alice as a very beautiful woman. It is a shame she had to die so young."

Marjorie remained silent for a long moment. She felt glad that the tragedy in her husband's life had not become public property. The world did not know that Graham's first wife had murdered her husband's uncle.

"Well, all is well that ends well," Rosalind Hope spoke again. "Very few people know what I went through before final happiness came to me."

"I know it," Marjorie replied. "You had an experience which comes to few women. You became Morris Hope's wife twice. You did a plucky thing, Rosalind, dear. You believed in a man although he was accused of having committed murder."

The other woman's eyes filled with tears, but she brushed them away resolutely.

"I made the mistake of allowing my father to decide for me in a crisis," she said. "If I had followed the dictates of my own heart and conscience, Morris Hope would never have married Dora Clyde after our separation. And he would not have been accused of murdering her."

Marjorie Ericsen touched her friend's hand affectionately.

"You must not allow yourself to ever think about that," she declared. "You and Morris are happy together now. Nothing else matters."

"No, nothing else matters," Rosalind agreed with

a bright smile, then rose. "Well, I'll have to leave you, my dear. I hope I shall see you often. You and your husband must call on us. We need you. We have not many friends, you know. We are still under the shadow of that murder."

"We'll be glad to come," responded Marjorie quickly. "I sympathize with you."

Chapter 332

THE HOPE CASE.

HE HOPE CASE was one of the most dramatic in London society's history. It had its inception when Rosalind Halcombe, then a student at an exclusive college for young women fell in love and eloped with Morris Hope. One of the direct results was an unusual meeting at which only three people were present. They were Dr. Halcombe, Rosalind's irate father, Rosalind, and the man she had married.

We find her, a young and beautiful girl, with a resolute gipsy face and an exquisite figure, seated by an open window.

She wore a white dress which displayed her splendid shoulders and lovely rounded arms to perfection, a bunch of vivid blossoms adorned the lace at her throat. and a golden arrow pierced the dusky plaits of her silken hair.

The gentleman who addressed her was old, and seemed in ill health, but his features were marked with the same look of indomitable will and open fearlessness that marked the finer, purer features of the daughter.

Father and daughter smiled as they both consulted the clock at the same time, but it was a troubled smile, and changed into a sigh as Rosalind rose and paced the room impatiently.

Presently a gentleman was announced:

"Mr. Morris Hope!"

"Show him in at once," said the old gentleman.

Morris Hope entered, bowed, and waited till it

should please one of them to address him.

He was an exceedingly handsome man, tall and straight as a young poplar; everything about him bespoke birth and breeding.

His eyes had an expression of force and courage, his handsome mouth looked almost cruel in its quiet compression.

Rosalind Halcombe, by a supreme effort of will, controlled her emotion, and said, icily:

"This is Mr. Morris Hope, father. Mr. Hope — my father, Dr Halcombe."

Both men bowed stiffly, one contemplating the wonderful beauty of the woman, the other thinking:

"Ah, my poor girl had some excuse for her folly. The man is handsome, and evidently a gentleman."

The old man said curtly:

"'Tis an unpleasant business that brings us together, Mr. Hope. Pray be seated. I will not detain you longer than is necessary to thoroughly understand one another."

Mr. Hope, with the grace of a courtier, drew a low chair forward for the lady, who, with a cool little nod, sank into it, searched for the finest bunch of purple grapes on a table near, and lay back enjoying them comfily among her cushions.

The younger man's eyes took in every detail of the exquisite picture she presented, while he seemingly gave all his attention to her father, who, after untying a bundle of papers, rested his arms on the table before him, and said, in a voice shaken by emotion:—

"Three years ago, Mr. Hope, you persuaded my only daughter to elope with you from school, and made her consent to a marriage that was a mockery, sir, a base cruel mockery.

"I found her at last after a heart-tiring search,

found her alone in miserable lodgings, half dead with despair at your deceit, for you had told her when you tired of her that she was not legally your wife, as you married her under an assumed name, while she was under age.

"I did not send for you to quarrel with you, so I will be brief. My opinion of you may be imagined, since I snatch at the hope of release offered by this statement of yours—snatch at it, sir, to save my child from life-long misery."

The younger man smiled slightly, and raised his hand as though to protest against the other's wrath, but the old man went on:

"Do not answer, please; I am in weak health, and dare not give way to my indignation. To be brief, you and my daughter did not agree; you were poor, she a burden, so she came back to be a comfort to her old father. Now, sir, I am a man of business, and like to see things settled as we go on. Is this story about an illegal marriage true? Is my daughter a free woman?"

The daughter in question still toyed with the big bunch of grapes, though her heart beat furiously.

Before he answered Mr. Hope looked upon all the loveliness of glorious womanhood he was resigning, and said quietly:

"'Tis quite true that the marriage was irregular. Miss Halcombe was under age, and I married her, with no ill-intent, under the name that was most convenient at the time for me to adopt. I have since heard on good authority that those circumstances render the marriage void.

"You must quite understand that if your daughter is willing, I am ready to rectify the blunder We have been hot-headed, impatient, ill-advised, unfortunate, and a thousand things that made our marriage a misery;

yet such is my love for your daughter that I am anxious to begin again and try to do better."

"No, no, a thousand times no," Rosalind cried, springing to her feet. "All I want of you is my freedom. Your fancy for me died so quickly that there is nothing on earth I fear so much as your fondness. Go, leave me in peace. I have suffered enough for my folly."

She spoke impetuously, with her blazing passionate eyes uplifted to the man she had called husband.

He shivered, her dread of him hurt more than all the stings poverty and misfortune had pressed upon him.

She had lain upon his heart, she had loved him, yet she was willing to embrace shame rather than renew the bonds he had broken.

Surely, he thought, he must be a worse man than he imagined himself, to have turned such devotion as hers so quickly to aversion; but then he remembered how miserable he had made her, and that she had a strong, resentful nature.

He had been mad to marry her, so down-trodden by fortune as he was; it was better she should be free to return to her father and learn to win contentment away from him.

He felt she might be a burden that might tie him down to poverty all his life. Hence it was that he now said coldly:

"Everything shall be directed by your daughter's wishes, Dr. Halcombe. I know from experience that is the only way to make her happy."

"Father, speak for me; you know my wishes."

"Very well, child. Then, Mr. Hope, I must tell you my daughter wishes to put the mistake of her girlhood out of her life for ever—to forget it, if possible.

"I am not a rich man, neither am I a poor one. I would buy my daughter's peace at any price in my power

to pay, so I propose to give you five hundred pounds, and for this sum I want you to promise you will never press any claim upon my girl.

"If you are one of the Hopes of Hope Chase you will be sensible of such a bond of honor, and will never dispute the power that the paper I wish you to sign places in my daughter's hands.

"I must tell you, too, that since I have known of this unfortunate attachment — this girlish indiscretion — I have altered my will so that no man will be able to interfere with the small fortune I shall leave to Rosalind. Of course, her brother Gerald will inherit the bulk of my property, and become his sister's guardian at my decease.

"But it is my wish that this unfortunate affair be kept secret from him if possible, for Rosalind's sake. Now, do you agree to sign this paper, the terms of which are that for the consideration of my paying you five hundred pounds you resign all claim to my daughter for all time?"

Mr. Hope went to the side of that silent, beautiful woman, and said softly:

"Roslind, what do you wish?"

"I wish only to be rid of you at any cost," she said passionately.

He bowed with a queer little smile, and took the pen the old man held out with shaking fingers, signed his name boldly, and dashed the pen on the floor, putting his heel on it, crushing the silver holder out of all shape, as he said in his low, level voice, that now quivered with passionate intensity of feeling:

"Never again shall that pen sign so unholy a contract."

Dr. Halcombe rose and quitted the room with a sad, set face, leaving Rosalind and the man she had

sworn to love, honor and obey, alone together face to face.

Mr. Hope was the first to speak; his words had a ring of real regret in them as he said:

"I am sorry that we ever met Now you go your way and I go mine, yet do not think it is possible we can quite forget. We have loved, have lived together, have blundered and parted, yet so surely as the threads of our lives once mingled, so shall they tangle again. Wife, have we done well?"

For answer Rosalind snatched the roses from her breast and crushed them in her passionate clasp.

"Is it well to spill the wine of life," she cried, "to crush out the beauty of early blossom thus, when they have nestled all their sweetness on your heart? Tear out your heart and throw it away and you shall suffer less than I who tear out the love of my life, and trample upon it to free the unfaithful man that my rebellious heart still holds its master. Say goodbye and go. I may never look upon your false face again; you have made me suffer as I hope woman never suffered before."

All at once, as the wind drops after a gale, her passion fell from her, and she stood wan and white before him.

He knew such beauty and passionate power to control men's hearts as she possessed must bring others to love her as he had done, and a jealous fire leapt to life in hi mat thought of her possible future as the beloved of another.

She was his; he had crushed all her grace and sweetness to his heart, and let them go again unvalued; yet now that he was resigning her for all time, the first pride of possession beat in his heart afresh.

Her unyielding voice said, "Go!" her vivid lips, though they quivered, never faltered while they sent him

into lifelong banishment.

One moment he looked upon all he had lost, then he drew her to his heart and pressed a paradise of kisses on her throat, her lips, her eyes, and she fell forward with a wonderful witchery of yielding, and clung to him as though in doing so lay all her hope of happiness.

Bending his head above her beautiful face he said softly:

"Rosalind, my darling, my wife, shall we forget all the foolishness of our mistaken past, begin fresh together, and try to make something better of our lives?"

She drew herself out of his embrace.

"Will you restore the price my father has paid you for my freedom? Will you give back the money and take me instead?"

"Rosalind," he said, miserably, "that money is my last chance, the straw to a drowning man. It may make my fortune—I must hold to it as the last opportunity left to retrieve a wasted youth. That money was meant for you—why dispute about that?

"With it we may make a home and be happy together; without it what awaits us but the old struggles, the old failures? Come, my wife, let your heart speak; be my very own again, and let me recompense you for past pain by future happiness."

"You can't give up the money, then Morris?" she said, with a scornful laugh. "Ah, it is easier to part with me. For Heaven's sake go; do you want to drive me mad?"

"Then you won't come with me, Rosalind?"

"No, never again. One does not walk wide awake into a wilderness twice in one's life."

Without another word he left her, and she fell forwrad upon the table, as the sun crept through the curtains and bathed her in a flood of glory.

The old man crept back to her side and said timidly:

"Hush! It breaks my heart to hear you sob so; I did not think you cared about this man so much."

"Neither did I—God help me—neither did I."

"When you rescued my dear wife from drowning, Mr. Hope, you won my lasting gratitude. What you ask of me now is but a slight favor. Of course you can buy a share in the bank; why, man, you have the price in your hand. I shall be only too glad to see you installed here before we go back to England.

"Someone must do my work; why should not you as well as another? It would make me happy to forward your wishes in all things; some day it may be in my power to show you a more substantial gratitude.

"Meanwhile, our friendship must grow; your father was my father's friend, as I hope to be yours. You will come back to England soon and stay with my wife and me. We must make you love our pet, too—our little Dora. Such a little sunbeam; the world would be dark indeed to us without her."

"She is your only child, I suppose, Mr. Clyde?"

"Yes, our only child, but such a child, so loving, so winning. Well, you will see her, and then you will forgive her father if he prizes her too dearly. When we meet again I hope you will be in better spirits; you have trouble to bear, I fear?

"But I must be going. Write and let me know how you like your post here, and come and visit us."

Continued in next number

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